

February 9, 1966

Mr. R. Sargent Shriver  
The Joseph P. Kennedy Jr. Foundation  
1411 K Street, N.W., Suite 402  
Washington 5, D. C.

Dear Mr. Shriver:

I guess if my mind ran in the channel of influencing public opinion I might be competing with you for public office rather than pursuing my labors in the vineyard of the university. As you know, even in the context of the academic community I have been rather shy about direct personal involvement with governmental and public affairs, and I think this is entirely appropriate on the principle that responsibility ought to be associated with talent. I am making a very vigorous response to Shockleyism in the arena that I am comfortable in, namely the university, and there has been plenty of opportunity to bring the matter up in teaching and even to some extent in public presentations on the campus. I would take a Linus Pauling to do an effective job along the lines that you suggest, which are badly needed. Perhaps it would be more consistent with the avowed role in life of a George Beadle to do this.

I would be glad to offer what I could by way of technical support for an educational program, but I am afraid that I am just not the right bird to be the scientific publicist so badly needed here.

In fact, I think that the expression "euphenics" has already proven itself a useful slogan in marshalling clearer thinking about the eugenic dilemma. I have some other writings in mind for the near future that may eventually prove to be contributions to this discussion, even if in a somewhat rarefied academic atmosphere.

Since you asked me how the Kennedy Foundation might be helpful I may, as usual, make a counter suggestion that you might well regard as not being sufficiently sharply focussed on the immediate concern. The problem is, how does the otherwise "informed public" get the benefit of sound scientific insight on a number of controversial questions. You know I have been bothered about the general public misunderstanding of the eugenic and similar issues for some time. One recourse that occurred to me would be to have a weekly column on the interpretation of science and its human impact in one of the major national newspapers, like the New York Times, or the Washington Post. While I would readily admit that this may be leaning quite a bit from the vertical position on which I insisted in previous paragraphs, the "cost-effectiveness" of such an effort would seem to me high enough that I would stick my neck out for it. I was

invited to do exactly this by the British general science magazine "The New Scientist", but decided that its reach would not justify the effort that I would have to put in. The matter has also been brought up in a number of other quarters, and as far as I know has nowhere been vehemently criticized, but neither has it been actually taken up. On a visit east some time ago, Professor Hamburg did bring it up with Mr. Eugene Meyer of the Washington Post, and I would assume that he is quite familiar with the proposal. From Dave Hamburg's report on the conversation I thought there might indeed be a receptive reaction to it, but nothing has happened. If this is a gambit that you have any way of helping to nudge along, it might really be a very effective answer to some parts of the question.

Another angle would be to help support some already viable and worth enterprise in the field of scientific information. There are two such enterprises in this country, for either of which a modest amount of financial encouragement might be quite crucial. One of them is the Bulletin of Atomic Scientists, which unfortunately has not really lived up to its expectation of becoming a general forum for science and public policy. The other would be a new magazine on that general theme that some of the people over at Science were trying to hatch but which is still unborn, probably on account of financial terror. Dave Greenberg at Science magazine would be the fellow to contact to see if that is still alive.

On a somewhat vaster scale, I have had some correspondence with Professor Arne Tiselius, President of the Nobel Foundation, about the desirability of founding a multilingual international journal under the possible auspices of the Nobel Foundation for just such purpose. I believe that Tiselius is personally very interested in this, but is somewhat reluctant to get the Nobel Foundation directly involved, or at least in a unique position, and there are some legal problems about using the funds from the Nobel bequest in a way that speaks the spirit more than the letter of his testament. I believe, nevertheless, that Tiselius would be most receptive ~~any~~ outside encouragements in this field.

Sincerely yours,

Joshua Lederberg  
Professor of Genetics

*and ~~stimulating~~ anticipation,  
+  
The Next Move*